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ABSTRACT

Facilitated communication is described as a method of training communication partners or facilitators to provide physical assistance to communication aid users, to help them overcome physical and emotional problems in using their aids. In Melbourne (Victoria, Australia), the DEAL (Dignity, Education and Language) Centre has identified 96 people (ages 6-18) who became able to communicate at a previously unrealized level of communication competence with the use of facilitated communication. One-third are now integrated in mainstream schooling. Issues in integration of these students are discussed, including teacher qualifications to meet needs of integrated students, teaching of social skills, low wages of integration aides, and low levels of training for integration aides. DEAL's attempts to increase the amount of direct liaison with schools are discussed, focusing on: (1) a survey of educationalists and parents of mainstreamed students at nine schools; (2) receiver training programs for parents and educationalists to increase their knowledge about facilitated communication techniques; and (3) increases in the number of visits made by DEAL staff to schools. (26 references) (JDD)

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FACILITATED COMMUNICATION

IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

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FACILITATED COMMUNICATION IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

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Facilitated Communication is a method of training people in the use of augmentative communication aids. It involves the communication partner or facilitator providing physical assistance to the communication aid user to help them overcome physical and emotional problems in using their aid. As the trainee's confidence and physical skill improves, the amount of assistance is reduced. In Victoria a number of non-speaking children, previously considered intellectually and/or emotionally disabled, have been able to demonstrate age-appropriate cognitive and language skills using this technique of communication. Our paper attempts to highlight issues common to the students' integration and raises questions of concern to people involved in integration.

KEY WORDS: Integration, Facilitated Communication

FACILITATED COMMUNICATION

The technique known as "Facilitated Communication" is documented internationally (Oppenheim, 1977, Crossley and McDonald 1980, Nolan 1987, Johnson 1988, 1989, Biklen 1990, Rimland 1990). The technique differs from graduated guidance in that the intention of movement is the responsibility of the message sender. The message receiver is making physical contact with the sender to overcome or minimise psychoemotional and/or neurophysiological problems. In Melbourne the DEAL (Dignity, Education and Language) Centre has been responsible since 1986 for identifying 96 people aged between 6-18 years who were able to communicate at a previously unrealised level of communication competence. See Table 1:

TABLE ONE:

FACILITATED COMMUNICATION
MAINSTREAM SCHOOLING 1986-1990

Total number of DEAL clients aged 6-18 years of age inclusive given 3 or more sessions	96
Total number of these clients now in mainstream education	
Full-time (5 days)	10
(2-4 days)	22
Part-time (<2 days)	5
	37
Total Number of these clients using Facilitated Communication in Mainstream Education	
Full-time	23
Part-time	5
	28

One third of this number are now integrated in mainstream schooling using the facilitated communication technique with integration support staff and others. All students were diagnosed as intellectually handicapped prior to their referral to DEAL. All were able to point to simple pictures on their referral to DEAL but applying the facilitated communication method all were able to spell age appropriate sentences.

INTEGRATION IN AUSTRALIA: CONCERNS FOR FACILITATED COMMUNICATION USERS

Integration policy and procedure varies from State to State just as it does from Country to Country and region from region. In Victoria integration began in 1985 with children who had a physical and/or sensory deficit. Later children with mild intellectual disability were included. Only recently have multiple disabilities and autism been considered and accepted for mainstream programs. In working with families who have or would like their children integrated from Special school settings it is of great concern that:

* there appears an inequity in the decision making process that allows full time integration aide support and programming for some children who are accepted into mainstream for "socialisation" and others who are capable of achieving academic and social goals with integration aide support using the F/C technique.

* where socialisation skills are deviant or lacking (as in autism) it is questionable as to how much gain will be made at the end of the students school life if socialisation and communication pragmatics are not taught. Immersion into a "normal", speaking environment does not necessarily predispose normal social or communicative interaction. Stobart (1986) points out that recess, physical education and assembly sessions are "possibly the worst times for social acceptance and adjustment to be made".

We question:

a) whether teachers have sufficient inservice provided to equip them with the skills necessary to meet the many and varied needs of their integrated students and

b) whether in primary school settings in particular, teaching of social skills should be built into the curriculum for integrated students.

Whilst there is a large body of research supporting integration for disabled students (Brown, Nietupoki 1977; Hamre-Nietupoki 1977; Brown 1983; Taylor, Biklen and Knoll 1987, Sailor 1989) there is a scarcity of research dealing with the effect of integration on non-disabled peers (Brown, Long, et al 1989). However, available research indicates that mainstreamed children are often rated by their peers as being of lower status, less popular and more undesirable than non-handicapped students (Bryan and Bryan 1982, Madden and Slairn 1983, Stobart 1986). Issues of the students' self-esteem and place in the school community are therefore called into question. It would be easy to imagine that a mainstreamed student may suffer from a lower self-esteem in the mainstream setting where he/she feels misplaced with both non-disabled peers and peers with the same disability (in S.D.S. settings).

The Victorian Education Department defines integration as "the maximum useful association between handicapped children and others consistent with the interests of both" (Notes compiled by Counselling, Guidance and Clinical Services 1982). A Ministerial Review conducted in 1984 referred to two aspects of policy and practice.

a) a process of increasing the participation of children with impairments and disabilities in the education programs and social life of regular schools in which their peers without disability participate

b) a process of maintaining the participation of all children in the educational programs and social life of regular schools.

Both processes refer to increasing participation of disabled students. In the case of children requiring the physical assistance of someone in order that they be able to communicate efficiently, this "increasing participation" is often thwarted when

a) integration aides receive very low wages (approximately $9-00 per hour). Consequently a financial incentive to maintain their position and relationship with the student is not there.

b) integration aides receive very little off-the-job training. With particular reference to autistic students or students displaying extreme communication frustration this can lead to both parties becoming despondent.

INTERACTION WITH INTEGRATION: THE DEAL PROGRAM

Until 1989 DEAL Communication staff worked predominantly in the one clinical location. Programs were organised after school, in school holidays and on Saturdays for students who were unable to come during school hours. Despite these reprogramming considerations, staff remained concerned that they were still not interacting with educationalists as much as they would like and that indirect feedback was being obtained from students, their families and teachers. The decision was made to try to increase the amount of direct liaison with schools in the following ways:

1. gauge school staff attitude to facilitated communication by directing a questionnaire to all schools where students attended using the facilitated communication technique.

2. send a similar questionnaire to parents of facilitated communication aid users in mainstream schooling to determine how parents were responding to the new set of demands on their lives.

3. to offer receiver-training programs for parents and educationalists to increase their knowledge about the technique and their ability to use facilitated communication with their children/students.

4. to increase the number of visits DEAL staff made (at non-budgeted cost) to schools. This would incur a 30%-50% reduction in active caseload numbers but would hopefully accelerate the progress students made in the use and generalisation of the technique.

Addressing the first two areas, questionnaires were sent to 9 schools where children were enrolled on a <u>full time basis</u>. Nine questionnaires were forwarded to the parents of children enrolled in full time mainstream education. An 80% response rate was obtained from the schools and parents. The results of the questionnaires are summarised as follows:

Issues Arising From Educationalists Response Form

1. No. of students enrolled in the schools under the provision of the integration act -49.

2. No. of students enrolled in the schools under the provision of the integration act who use facilitated communication 9 (18% of 1).

3. Subjects the facilitated communcation aid user appears to excel in: Science, Maths, Creative Writing, English.

4. Most respondents (75%) felt that whilst they had received adequate information from DEAL regarding the application of the technique known as "Facilitated Communication", they were unprepared for the special teaching and communication-partner skills the students required.

5. Training of personnel to use the technique with the students was seen as a priority for successful communication interaction and consequently integration. Similarly, the availability of professional support-staff experienced in the use of facilitated communication was seen as very important to successful integration.

6. A number of factors were cited as lacking in the present system of integration. In rank order these were

   i) access to professional services
   ii) inservice provision
   iii) withdrawal areas
   iv) adequate evaluation of integration
   v) equipment
   vi) additional teaching aide quotas

   Educationalists viewed the long term benefits for the Facilitated Comunication Aid students as (rank order)

7. i) independent use of the comunication device
   ii) greater socialisation with peers
   iii) general improvement in the quality of life
   iv) academic accomplishment
   v) post-tertiary education
   vi) employment in the community

Issues Arising From Parent Response Form

1. Average period student spent in special school setting prior to integration into mainstream setting. 6 years 8 months.

2. Integration was seen as a possibility largely because of new found communication skills (facilitated communication), the opportunity to interact with "normal" peer group and the anticipation of better quality of life.

3. 75% of the respondents considered that their application for integration was received positively and adequate information was given regarding integration policy.

4. Changes reported within the family network since integration include

   i) students forming new friends
   ii) increased participation in social and recreational activities
   iii) increased parental involvement in meetings e.g. integration support meetings (this was often recorded as an added stress).
   iv) increase in more appropriate behaviour (students!)
   v) students appear happier, more relaxed and fulfilled
   vi) student is more socially responsive
   vii) improved verbal communication skills
   viii) improved self-esteem
   ix) opportunity for greater generalisation and development of communcation and life skills
   x) chance to become an integral community member at all levels!

ADDRESSING ISSUES:

RECEIVER TRAINING

Until June 1989 receiver training had been conducted at the DEAL Centre within the individual client session. In June, 34 teachers and integration staff attended a 3 hour workshop to disseminate information about facilitated communication and share ideas on using the technique in mainstream settings. Sharing information on the technicalities and practicalities was seen as paramount to receiver training programs. This also formed the basis of a support network of teachers with facilitated communication aid users. In October 1989, 39 parents attended a similar 3 hour program. In February 1990, 200 teachers and integration staff applied to attend a receiver training program offered by DEAL. Four receiver training programs were consequently held within the state of Victoria in an attempt to meet needs.

In June 1990 funding of $2,000 was received from the Ministry of Education to assist with the funding of in-service programs to teachers interested in or working with Facilitated Communication. Also in June 1990 DEAL staff were able to compile handout material on the subject of receiver skills for facilitated communication use on the basis of observations, feedback and experience to date.

DIRECT SCHOOL LIAISON

An increasing number of visits have been made to schools to assist with generalisation of the students' communication skills in context. This has been productive in terms of:

* observing students behaviour in group context
* advising staff on communication practicalities in classroom settings
  i.e. completing mathematics/science with specially designed communication displays
* monitoring and liaising re: behavioural management
* liaising re: curriculum modification (homework expectations in particular)
* in-servicing staff on site
* assisting peer interaction with non-speaking students

The majority of outreach visits have been made to students in partial mainstream integration settings and have included visits to the Special Schools where the student also attends. Important observations that have been made include the following:

1. Student-teacher ratio can be as low as 4:1 in SDS settings and as high as 34:1 in mainstream settings.

2. attention span of many children in SDS settings has been observed as 4-9 minutes compared with 20-40 minutes for the same child in mainstream settings.

3. quality of language and performance expectation varies tremendously from one setting to another e.g. using facilitated communication in an SDS setting, a nine year old was working on sentence completion with picture clue ("This is a big brown _____"). The same child in mainstream setting was naming the leaders of the main political parties.

4. Teachers in mainstream schooling - particularly Secondary level, had less time to work hands on with f/c students and were more dependent on the student having the resource of integration aide support if academic participation in class was to take place.

5. Homework for the f/c students in mainstream education was a new area of development - and involved a committment from parents who acted as the students receiver. For parents much more work was involved than <u>they</u> anticipated as they often needed a basic understanding of the subject i.e. algebra.

6. Staff changes in both special and mainstream settings was often alarming. DEAL staff were able to place only 3 students on long term review, as not only did students needs change, but attempts to train and inservice teachers/aides as communication partners and involve them more in the training of other teachers was prevented by staff turnover.

CONCLUSION

The concept of integration of disabled students appears to be constantly gaining popularity. The student using facilitated communication in integrated settings is perhaps more dependent on human resources than many other disabled students. The facilitated communication user is often slower to initiate interactions and build relationships. Self-esteem, emotional and psychological development are subsequently very vulnerable. Whilst there is compelling evidence to indicate that mainstreamed students perform better academically out of the segregated setting there has been little attention to the psychological and emotional outcomes of mainstreaming and the differences in teacher expectations and instruction delivery which precipitate the improved academic performance.

Care must be taken not to abuse the ideals of integration by under resourcing essential elements. The term "maindumping" is applied when the essential resources and curriculum modifications are not made available to the integrated student. Stainback and Stainback (1985) detail four strategies essential for successful integration. These are summarised as:

a) dissemination of information
b) structuring of programs
c) teaching social skills
d) monitoring disabled - non disabled peer interactions

Bogdan and Biklen (1985) add the strategy of "demonstration of positive attitudes". McDonnell and Hardman (1989) include "a willingness to learn new patterns" for service delivery.

Tremendous demands are placed on everyone involved in the integration of the Facilitated Communication user. Whilst successful outcome is dependent on human and establishment resources, long term success is dependent on community attitudes. Educating teachers and integration staff in the implications of non-speech communication and the Facilitated Communication Technique is a very high priority of the DEAL Communication Centre. We are becoming increasingly concerned that this area of service delivery, whilst essential, detracts from direct client contact and needs to be accounted for in the organisational model and funding.

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